Basics



What are they?

Points To Remember About Arthritis and Rheumatic Diseases

- The term arthritis is often used to refer to any disorder that affects the joints.
- Rheumatic diseases usually affect joints, tendons, ligaments, bones, and muscles. Some rheumatic diseases can also affect the organs.
- People with arthritis usually feel pain in one or more joints. Joints may also be warm, red, or hard to move.
- There are probably many genes that make people more likely to have rheumatic diseases.
- If you have the disease gene, something in your environment—such as a virus or injury—may trigger the disease.
- Medications are often used to treat symptoms of arthritis and rheumatic diseases. Surgery may be an option in some cases.
- There are many other things you can do to help you live with arthritis and other rheumatic diseases.

The term arthritis is often used to refer to any disorder that affects the joints. There are more than 100 rheumatic diseases. Rheumatic diseases usually affect joints, tendons, ligaments, bones, and muscles. Some rheumatic diseases can also affect the organs.

Who gets them?

Rheumatic diseases affect millions of people of all races and ages in the United States.

What are the types?

There are numerous types of arthritis and other rheumatic diseases, including:

- Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis. It damages cartilage (tissue that cushions the ends of bones) and bone.
- Rheumatoid arthritis occurs when the body attacks the joint's lining. The hands and feet are mostly affected.
- Gout is a type of arthritis caused by crystals that form in the joints, usually beginning in the big toe.
- Infectious arthritis is caused by bacteria or viruses.
- Juvenile idiopathic arthritis is the most common form of arthritis in childhood
- **Spondyloarthropathies** usually affect the spine. There are a few forms:
 - o Ankylosing spondylitismay also affect the hips, shoulders, and knees.
 - Reactive arthritis is caused by urinary tract or bowel infection.
 - Psoriatic arthritis occurs in some patients with the skin disorder, psoriasis.
- Bursitis occurs when small, fluid-filled sacs in the joint become swollen.
- **Fibromyalgia** causes muscle pain and tender points—areas on the body that are painful when pushed.
- Polymyalgia rheumatica affects many of the structures around the joint.
- Polymyositis causes muscle swelling and weakness.
- **Scleroderma** causes the skin, blood vessels, and joints to become thicker. The disease sometimes also affects the lungs and kidneys.
- **Systemic lupus erythematosus** swelling and damage to the joints, skin, kidneys, heart, lungs, blood vessels, and brain.
- **Tendinitis** causes swelling of the tissues that connect muscle to bone.

What are the symptoms?

There are different symptoms, depending upon the disease. People with arthritis usually feel pain in one or more joints. Joints may also be warm, red, or hard to move.

What causes them?

There are probably many genes that make people more likely to have rheumatic diseases. Research has found some of these genes.

If you have the disease gene, something in your environment—such as a virus or injury—may trigger the disease.

Are there tests?

To diagnosis you with arthritis or another rheumatic disease, your doctor may:

- Ask you about your medical history.
- Give you a physical exam.
- Take samples for a laboratory test.
- Take x-rays.

How are they treated?

There are many treatments that can help relieve pain and help you live with arthritis and rheumatic diseases. You should talk to your doctor about the best treatments for you, which can include:

- **Medications** to relieve pain, slow the disease, and prevent further damage.
- Surgery to repair joint damage or relieve pain.

Who treats them?

Doctors who diagnose and treat arthritis and other rheumatic disease include:

- General practitioners, such as your family doctor.
- Rheumatologists, who specialize in arthritis and other diseases of the bones, joints, and muscles.
- Orthopaedists, who specialize in treatment and surgery for bone and joint diseases.
- Physical therapists, who help improve joint function.
- Occupational therapists, who teach ways to protect joints, minimize pain, perform activities
 of daily living, and conserve energy.
- Dietitians, who teach about good diets and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Nurse educators, who help you understand your condition and help start treatment plans.
- Rehabilitation specialists, who help you make the most of your physical potential.
- Licensed acupuncture therapists, who reduce pain and improve physical functioning by inserting fine needles into the skin at specific points on the body.
- Psychologists or social workers, who help with social challenges caused by medical conditions.
- Chiropractors, who focus treatment on the relationship between the body's structure—mainly the spine—and its functioning.
- Massage therapists, who press, rub, and otherwise manipulate the muscles and other soft tissues of the body.

Living With Them

There are many things you can do to help you live with arthritis and other rheumatic diseases, including:

- Exercise can reduce joint pain and stiffness. It also helps with losing weight, which
 reduces stress on the joints. You should speak to your doctor about a safe, well-rounded
 exercise program.
- Diet is especially important if you have gout. You should avoid alcohol and foods such as liver, kidney, sardines, anchovies, and gravy.
- Heat and cold therapies can reduce joint pain and swelling.
- Relaxation therapy can help reduce pain by teaching you ways to relax your muscles.
- Splints and braces support weakened joints or allow them to rest. You should see your doctor to make sure your splint or brace fits well.
- Assistive devices such as a cane or shoe insert can ease pain when walking. Other devices can help you open jars, close zippers, or hold pencils.

For More Info

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: https://www.fda.gov

Drugs@FDA at https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf. Drugs@FDA is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Website: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Website: https://www.niaid.nih.gov

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

Website: https://nccih.nih.gov

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

Website: https://www.aaos.org

American College of Rheumatology Website: https://www.rheumatology.org

Arthritis Foundation

Website: https://www.arthritis.org

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov.

- Asian Language Health Information
- Spanish Language Health Information

Related Information

Questions and Answers about Ankylosing Spondylitis

What Is Ankylosing Spondylitis (fast facts, easy-to-read)

¿Qué es la espondilitis anquilosante? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil ...

Living With Arthritis: Health Information Basics for You and Your Family

Cómo vivir con artritis: Información básica de salud para usted y su familia

Questions and Answers about Bursitis and Tendinitis

What Are Bursitis and Tendinitis? (Fast facts, easy-to-read)

¿Qué son la bursitis y la tendinitis? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil ...

Questions and Answers about Fibromyalgia

What Is Fibromyalgia? (fast facts, easy-to-read)

¿Qué es la fibromialgia? (Esenciales: Hojas informativas de fácil lectura)

Questions and Answers about Gout

What Is Gout? (fast facts, easy-to-read)

¿Qué es la gota? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)

Questions and Answers about Juvenile Arthritis

What Is Juvenile Arthritis? (fast facts, easy-to-read)

Esenciales: ¿Qué es la artritis juvenil? (hojas informativas de fácil lectura)

Osteoarthritis. Handout on Health

What Is Osteoarthritis? (fast facts, easy-to-read)

¿Que es la osteoartritis? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)

Questions and Answers about Polymyalgia Rheumatica and Giant Cell Arteritis

What Are Polymyalgia Rheumatica and Giant Cell Arteritis? (fast facts, easy-to-...

¿Qué son la polimialgia reumática y la arteritis de células gigantes? (Esenciale...

Psoriatic Arthritis Overview

Questions and Answers about Reactive Arthritis

What Is Reactive Arthritis? (fast facts, easy-to-read)

¿Qué es la artritis reactiva? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)

Rheumatoid Arthritis, Handout on Health

What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis? (Fast Facts, easy-to-read)

¿Qué es la artritis reumatoide? (Esenciales: Hojas informativas de fácil lectur...

Scleroderma, Handout on Health

What Is Scleroderma? (fast facts, easy-to-read)

¿Qué es la esclerodermia? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, Handout on Health

Living With Lupus: Health Information Basics for You and Your Family

What Is Lupus? (fast facts, easy-to-read)

¿Qué es el lupus? (Esenciales: Hojas informativas de fácil lectura) Healthy Joints Matter

View/Download/Order Publications

Gout, Questions and Answers about